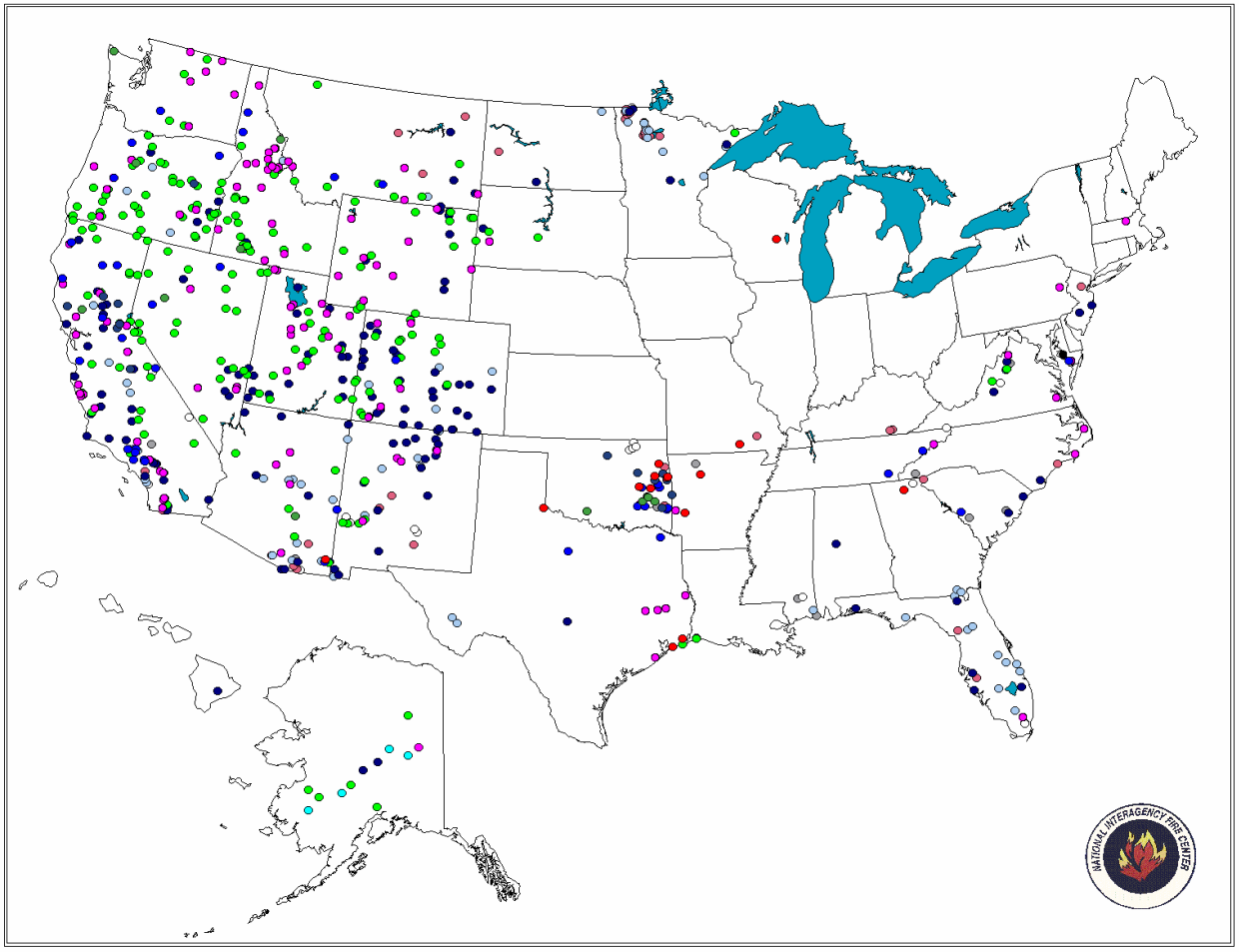
National Interagency Coordination Center

2002 Statistics and Summary



2002 Large Fire Locations

January	July
February	August
March	September
April	October
May	November
June	December

National Interagency Coordination Center

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Identifier Legend

Interagency Coordination Centers

AK - Alaska
EA - Eastern Area
EB - Eastern Great Basin
NICC - National
NO - Northern California
NR - Northern Rockies
NW - Northwest
RM - Rocky Mountain
SA - Southern Area
SO - Southern California
SW - Southwest
WB - Western Great Basin

CIFFC - Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre

NIK - National Interagency Radio Support Cache

Other:
PRI - Private

Government Agencies

Department of the Interior:
BIA - Bureau of Indian Affairs
BLM - Bureau of Land Management
FWS - Fish & Wildlife Service
NPS - National Park Service
OAS - Office of Air Services

Department of Agriculture:
FS - Forest Service

DDQ - **Department of Defense**

Department of Homeland Security:
FEMA - Federal Emergency Management Agency

Department of Commerce:
WXW - National Weather Service

ST - State

CN - Canada

Preface

All wildland fire and acreage statistics were gathered from the National Situation Report program, individual geographic areas detailed situation reports, submitted incident status summaries (ICS-209's), and previous NICC annual reports. The statistics presented in this report provide for a national perspective. The statistics are delineated by agency and geographic areas.
For specific or more detailed information contact individual agencies for official statistics.

Resource mobilization statistics were gathered from the National Interagency Coordination Center's (NICC) database. The statistics presented are the resource requests that were processed through NICC and ordered by one of the eleven interagency coordination centers. The resource ordering process and procedures may be found in chapter 20 of the National Mobilization Guide. The National Mobilization Guide can be found on the NICC web site, (www.nifc.gov/news/nicc.html) under reference materials. The term "Other" may be used in different context throughout this report; "other" may refer to an agency or the type of a resource.

(The Rocky Mountain Coordination Center is located in Lakewood, CO.)

Annual Fire Summary 2002

January – March

The Southern Area experienced primarily numerous small fires lasting from only a few days to a week. The largest fire, named Okeefenoke Swamp, started in March and burned into June, with a final total of 127,000 acres. Weather had a minimal influence on this incident, and the FWS provided direct attack when wind pushed the fire towards encroachment on National Wildlife Refuge boundaries and nearby structures.

In contrast, fire season started early for the Southwest Area, as multi-year drought conditions and one of the driest winters on record led to a spring fire danger much above normal. The usual spring winds were accompanied by below normal precipitation, and large fires emerged across the southern portion of the Geographic Area. A two-day wind event March 23rd and 24th contributed to the destruction of a number of homes in southern New Mexico, near Ruidoso.

April - June

Through May and June, hot and dry conditions persisted and intensified, particularly in the Southwest and Rocky Mountain Areas. Incursions of moisture brought mostly dry lightning in June interspersed with periods of record heat and breezy afternoons. The Rocky Mountain Area experienced fire activity, including high elevation fires, four to five weeks earlier than normal due to persistent drought conditions along with a spring snow pack of only 20 to 40 percent of normal. Fire danger in many areas was high for a record number of days in June. The sharp, early rise in activity led to elevating the National Preparedness Level (PL) 5 on June 21st and remaining there for a record 59 days.

In the Southwest, the human caused Ryan and Penasco fires started at the end of April and were advanced by a prolonged wind event from April 30th to May 3rd. The Bullock fire near Tucson, Arizona threatened several subdivisions and was exacerbated by hot, dry conditions and three major wind events from May 21st to June 10th. Lightning in north-central New Mexico on June 1st sparked the Spring fire and the Ponil Complex. These and other smaller fires in the area, fanned by strong southwest winds from June 7th to the 9th, burned over 100,000 acres. The human caused Rodeo/Chediski complex began on June 18th, following a week of record hot and dry conditions in Arizona.

In May, a large and persistent upper level ridge established itself over Alaska, bringing record temperatures and very low relative humidity. On May 22nd and 23rd, after weeks of a drying trend, three large human caused fires erupted, each requiring Type 2 Incident Management Teams: the Vinasale, Milepost 78 and North Fork of the Chena. The upper level ridge finally broke down on May 26th with the arrival of a dry cold front producing gusty north and northeast winds. The winds contributed to a two-day gain of 152,302 acres.

On the Missionary Ridge fire in the Rocky Mountain Area, a large fire whirl developed on June 19 near the Vallecito Reservoir. The phenomenon turned over a camper and uprooted several trees. The nearby Hayman fire also exhibited numerous plume-dominated days with very high Haines index values.

The Eastern Great Basin endured several lightning events all followed by strong wind. The first major episode of lightning occurred on June 1st and 2nd and started six fires totaling 6,000 acres. More lightning struck June 20th through the 22nd, causing a spike in initial attack.

The Eastern Area had a moderate spring fire season with fire activity occurring early in the Boundary Waters region of northeast Minnesota. Fire season in the Great Lakes states was very active but shorter in duration, with Minnesota reporting thirty-three large fires. The most significant anomaly in the area was the number of lightning-caused fires starting in the New England and Big Rivers Compact areas. By early summer, fire danger was greatly reduced as rain showers frequented the region. Continuing drought conditions led to initial attack activity through late summer in New England and many Northeast states.

July – September

In the Northwest Area, fuels were continuing to dry significantly in July as a result of record-breaking heat. Burns, Oregon, set successive records for high temperatures with 103 degrees on July 10th, 106 degrees on July 11th, and finally 107 degrees on July 12th. Medford had 5 consecutive days of 100+ temperatures from July 9th through the 13th, peaking at 108 degrees. Right on the heels of those sweltering days, July 12th to July 15th, was a dry lightning outbreak in both Oregon and Washington that produced 375 fires. 16 of these became large (100+ acres) fires. Three fires, the Biscuit, the Tiller Complex and the Deer Point, remained active into early September. Two more lightning outbreaks occurred in July bringing to three the total number of distinct lightning episodes and tripling the normal episode count for July. Gusty north to northeast winds in southwestern Oregon resulted in the rapid growth of the Florence and Biscuit fires on July 28th and 29th. These two fires eventually merged to become the largest fire in the country this year at 500,000 acres. A military battalion out of Ft. Riley, Kansas was mobilized on July 28th to the Monument fire in Oregon. On August 3rd the battalion was reassigned to the Tiller Complex in Oregon. The battalion was released on August 15. By August, the Northwest Area had burned 372% of their average yearly acreage.

In the Northern California Area, the main event of the 2002 season came in late July as an earlier than normal north wind event pushed fires over the Oregon border into northwest California. Several of these north wind events occurred this season, all taking place around three weeks ahead of their normal schedule. On July 12th, the same weather system that initiated the large Oregon fires spread a path of lightning across Modoc County in northern California starting six large fires over the next three days. This fire activity resulted in 248% of their 10-year average values for acres burned.

In Alaska, a mid-July period of very active lightning storms produced 75 fires in 4 days. On the 17th of July, 25 new lightning fires started culminating in the busiest initial attack period of the 2002 summer. In August, a large, very strong upper level dry high pressure system brought late season drying to areas that are typically wet by that time of year. Overall, Alaska burned 337% of their average acreage during the 2002 fire season.

In the Northern Rockies the season began with low 1000-hour fuel moistures after a fourth consecutive low snowfall winter and sustained drought. Monthly moisture readings across the geographic area showed below normal values from November 2001 through August 2002. The overall atmospheric pattern also provided relatively mild temperatures. The weather highlights of the season began with a very strong ridge of high pressure over the western U.S. in July, which was broken down by a cold front. The front produced dry thunderstorms that sparked seven large fires that burned 14,412 acres near the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and Pryor Mountains in Montana. In mid-August a powerful front moved down the front range of the northern Rockies, generating wind speeds in excess of 50 to 60 mph in many locations. Because of these conditions, the Steamboat Fire, 40 miles northeast of Billings, burned 3,000 acres in only six hours.

In the Eastern Great Basin, a particularly large outbreak of fires resulted from a lightning event from July 6-8. The lightning occurred during a record-breaking heat wave with simultaneously low relative humidity and poor overnight humidity recovery. On August 4th, another round of lightning started fires in the Frank Church Wilderness that burned into early September.

In the Western Great Basin, a notable dry lightning event occurred July 12th through 14th but generally very few weather events appeared through early September. From July through September there were 165 new fires starts with 13 becoming large fires and burning a total of 43,081 acres. These fires accounted for 54% of the large fires and 53% of the total acreage for the season in the Western Great Basin. As of September 1st, 24 large (300+ acres) fires had occurred.

A lack of southerly wind flow caused an atypical loss of monsoon moisture in the Southwest by August. This increased fire danger levels significantly and record high Energy Release Component values were noted in the month of August. As a result, any new large fires offered stiff resistance to control and eventually burned 351% of the Southwest's normal acreage by August.

In the Rocky Mountain Area, large fires continued to burn until relief arrived in mid-July with the onset of westward moving fronts and the monsoon. An unusual amount of plume dominated fire days occurred due to extreme atmospheric instability and heat. The lightning diminished in August leaving several Wildland Fire Use Incidents to continue away from high population centers. As of August 20th, the Rocky Mountain Area had burned 587% of its previous ten-year average number of acres.

In southern California, there were large fires each month from January through September 2002. Lightning started several of these fires, but the majority of them were human caused. Fires that grew in May were related to very dry fuels produced from long-term drought rather than pronounced individual weather events.

By the end of August, the Eastern, Southern, Northern Rockies and the Great Basin Areas all recorded below average acres burned during this same period (burning - 86%, 70%, 56% and 50% of their normal annual acres burned respectively).

Season Resource Highlights

This season, Type 1 Incident Management Teams received 85 assignments encompassing a total of 999 days. Teams were assigned for 170 consecutive days from the 4th of April through the 20th of September. MAFFS aircraft were mobilized in mid-June to augment the civilian retardant aircraft fleet. A total of eight aircraft supported suppression operations from bases in Colorado Springs, CO, San Bernardino, CA, Hill Air Force Base, UT, Boise, ID, and Spokane, WA. These military C-130 aircraft flew fire missions until August 19 when they were demobilized. During this period MAFFS flew 652 sorties, logged 757 flight hours, and made 637 drops totaling 1,646,903 gallons of retardant. The nation went to Preparedness Level 5 on June 21, and remained there through mid August, except for one break from August 13 to 19 when the National Preparedness Level dropped to 4. The nation set a new record for the number of days at National Preparedness Level 5, a total of 62 days.